Contents

List of Illustrations x
List of Tables xvii
Acknowledgements xviii
List of Abbreviations xx
Series Preface xxi

1 Introduction 1
1.1 Equid–human relations 1
1.2 Sources and terminology 4
1.3 The ancient Near East in the third and second millennium BCE 10

2 Equid Species: Spirited Horses, Stoic Donkeys and Vigorous Hybrids 13
2.1 Faunal remains 14
2.2 Textual sources 20
2.3 Iconography 23
2.4 Temperament, behaviour and agency 26

3 Beginnings, History and Distribution 35
3.1 First encounters and 'domestication' 35
3.2 Detecting interaction 37
3.3 Historical and geographical overview 45

4 Equids Changing History I: Caravans and Transport of Goods 55
4.1 Beasts of burden 55
4.2 Trade and exchange of equids 65
4.3 Mobility and routes 69

5 Equids Changing History II: Chariots and Traction 71
5.1 Ploughing 71
5.2 Wheeled vehicles and means of communication 72
5.3 Hunting 92
5.4 War 93
5.5 Transport and processions 99

6 Joint journeys: Equids Carrying Humans 103
6.1 Equids as mounts 103
6.2 Mounted messengers 111
6.3 Ceremonial and elite riding 114
6.4 Riding styles and equipment 116

7 Management of Equids, or, How to Keep a Human 121
7.1 Fed, pastured, stabled 121
7.2 Ownership and personnel 125
7.3 Bred and branded 129
7.4 Veterinarians and equine health 133
7.5 Mutual training 135

8 Honourable and Dishonourable Deaths 141
8.1 Eaten, skinned, hunted 141
8.2 Buried, honoured and sacrificed 145
8.3 Killed in battle and other deaths 160

9 Equid–Human Relations and Equid Agency 163
9.1 Size, gender, age and colour 163
9.2 Tack and equipment 169
9.3 Equid movement and gestures 171
9.4 Agency, personhood and equid–human relations 176

10 Conclusion 181

Appendices 185
A Glossary of terms (modern) 185

Notes 187
References 199

Index of Place Names 231
Subject Index 233

Online Appendices 000
B Ancient terminology related to equids
C Equine physical attributes according to species
D Zooarchaeological identification of *Equidae* from the ancient Near East
E Estimation of withers heights based on faunal remains

F Catalogue of sites with equid remains
G Catalogue of sites with terracotta equid figurines
H Catalogue of iconography of equids with wheeled vehicles
I Catalogue of iconography of equid and rider
J Catalogue of other iconography depicting equids
K Additional distribution maps

38178.indb 9 20/12/21 1:54 pm

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38178.indb 18 20/12/21 1:54 pm

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38178.indb 19 20/12/21 1:54 pm

Series Preface

While our intention in writing this preface was to provide a neutral introduction that could stand for the whole series, recent events are too dramatic and relevant to ignore. The Covid-19 pandemic and the climate emergency have increased awareness of human reliance and impact on the environments we occupy, dramatically emphasised human inability to control nature, and reinforced perceptions that the environment is the most pressing political and social issue of our time. It confirms our belief that the time is right to situate our current (abnormal?) relationship with nature within an examination of human interactions with the environment over the *longue durée* – a belief that has given rise to this series.

Ancient Environments sets out to explore (from a variety of perspectives) different constructions of the 'environment' and understandings of humankind's place within it, across and around the Mediterranean from 3500 BCE–750 CE. By 'environment' we mean the worlds of living and non-living things in which human societies and cultures exist and with which they interact. The series focuses on the *co-construction* of humans and the natural world. It examines not only human-led interactions with the environment (e.g. the implications of trade or diet), but also those that foreground earth systems and specific environmental phenomena; it investigates both physical entities and events and ancient, imagined environments and alternate realities. The initial and primary focus of this series is the ancient world, but by explicitly exploring, evaluating and contextualising past human societies and cultures in dialogue with their environments, it also aims to illuminate the development and reception of environmental ideas and concepts, and to provoke a deeper understanding of more long-term and widespread environmental dynamics.

The geographical remit of this series includes not only the cultures of the Mediterranean and Near East, but also those of southern Europe, North Africa including Egypt, northern Europe, the Balkans and the shores of the Black Sea. We believe that encompassing this broader geographical extent supports a more dynamic, cross-disciplinary and comparative approach – enabling the series to transcend traditional boundaries in scholarship. Its temporal range is also far-reaching: it begins with the Neolithic (a dynamic date range, depending on

location in the Near East/Europe) because it marks a distinct change in the ways in which human beings interacted with their environment. We have chosen *c.* 750 CE as our end date because it captures the broadest understanding of the end of Late Antiquity in the Central Mediterranean area, marking the rise of the Carolingians in the West, and the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate in the East.

Our series coincides with, and is inspired by, a particular focus on 'the environmental turn' in studies of the ancient world, as well as across humanities more generally. This focus is currently provoking a reassessment of approaches that have tended to focus solely on people and their actions, prompting scholars to reflect instead (or alongside) on the key role of the environments in which their historical subjects lived, and which shaped and were shaped by them. By extending beyond the chronological and geographical boundaries that often define — and limit — understanding of the meaning of 'antiquity', we intend that this series should encourage and enable broader participation from within and beyond relevant academic disciplines. This series will, we hope, not only advance the investigation of ancient ecological experiences, but also stimulate reflection on responses to contemporary ecological challenges.

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